

ALEX SANDVOSS

curated by Kellyn Kavanagh



January 11 - March 8, 2025

ART ON DEMAND III.I



The chokehold of neoliberalism, a parasitic ideology that upholds economic deregulation and market growth as critical to the benefit of society, is killing our planet as quickly as it polarizing us. In the eyes of the neoliberal, if corporations are doing well, society is doing well; everyone else be damned. All this, while lining the pockets of major corporate oligarchs, who profit from personal desperation as well as social isolation and fragmentation. Corporate oligarchs sell this agenda to us as something to celebrate, as though they are doing us a favour. Men such as Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg preach to us a gospel of fairness, impartiality, and freedom as rationale for eroding any and all protections on

their platforms against misinformation and disinformation, claiming that verifiable facts have a left-wing bias. Conspiracy theories run rampant and reality becomes constructed by the echo chambers we find ourselves trapped in; by the time we become aware of the patterns, US Congress has passed bills through legislature that erode civil rights on a global scale and create sizeable swells in the vaults of insatiable corporations who would sooner tear our planet apart before they risk a minuscule drop in their profits. The parasite of neoliberalism thrives on our blindness, ignorance, and apathy. It exists latched onto our collective subconscious and relies on us to continue feeding its hunger without being truly conscious of what we are doing. In some cases, we even pat ourselves on the back for it. Neoliberalism is the common thread that ties together our collective socioeconomic suffering with the rapidly declining health of our planet. In order for us to combat this weapon of exploitation, we need to recognize its influence around us and call it as we see it.

It is these concerns and awareness that guide Surrey-based artist Alex Sandvoss, as she creates paintings that are as sharply critical and satirical as they are beautiful. The series, titled *I want to think about feminism, but I have to think about climate change*, foreshadows the foreboding cloud of climate crisis that lingers over the issues of human rights that we see today. In particular focus is the patriarchy's attack women's rights and mobilization of the right in order to sustain power for American oligarchs who rely on the divided, distracted populace.

Sandvoss appropriates painting styles from the Italian Renaissance and Baroque and the Dutch Golden Age, as well as specific iconic compositions such as Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), as a means of reframing the way we look at current icons of late-stage

capitalism and their influence over modern society. Drawing on the example of Rembrandt, Sandvoss positions the lifeless body of a woman onto the dissection table where the original painting included the corpse of an executed criminal. The inclusion of a woman playing the role of the executed criminal draws a grim allusion to the reality of the Republican party placing criminal charges against women in red states who seek out access to abortion services in states where such services are still legal. Where Rembrandt painted the doctors who paid money to be included in the work, Sandvoss includes the Trump-loyalist Supreme Court who maintain their power through bribery.

The exhibition is laid out in two parts that establish a full circle, with parts one and two being interchangeable depending on which angle one approaches the works. On one side, we have a group of works that ties together relevant issues of social justice with ecological exploitation and the looming threat of climate crisis. The allegorical composition *Peace Bringing Abundance To The World* examines the concept of white guilt and performative action: a white woman holding a luxury Louis Vuitton handbag spilling out a lavish cornucopia of fruits and a wallet in left—her arm in extension, as though offering it to someone—is comforted by an Asian woman. Hanging beside *Peace Bringing Abundance To The World* is *Sisyphus*, a modernized interpretation of the ancient Greek tale of a man cursed to continue pushing an enormous boulder up an infinite mountain. Unlike iconic representations of the myth from the canon of European art, however, Sandvoss has chosen a Black figure to embody the character of Sisyphus. What is more, the boulder is replaced by another Louis Vuitton bag. The vague dark background of Antonio Zanchi's 17th-century Sisyphus is replaced here by an aggressive swirl of clouds swallowing Sisyphus into oblivion. He is bent down under the crushing weight of another Louis Vuitton bag as he attempts to continue carrying himself forward with no end in sight, no hope for escape.

Opposite *Peace Bringing Abundance To The World* and *Sisyphus* hang the ghostly depictions of some highly prominent figures. *Jeff Bezos and The Green New Deal* calls to mind a gathering of profiteers in a shadowy room celebrating a victory at someone else's expense. *Promises To Keep* reminds us of the fact Elon Musk, after promising to use his wealth to combat world hunger, abandoned any intention of following through. These images are accompanied by *A Hapless Toad*, Sandvoss's 2023 interpretation of Rembrandt van Rijn's iconic composition, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. Here, American society lays on the dissection table under the oppressive hand of (then former and now current) US President Donald Trump, while from left to right Supreme Court Justices Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, Barrett, Alito, Thomas, and Roberts (all nominated by Republican Presidents) and Republican Senator and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell at the far right grin with crass indifference. This allegory of American society is a tragic depiction of a woman stripped of all agency, used as fodder for the growing power of the Republican party, one that thrives on appealing to the patriarchal predilections of Christian-nationalists.

Finally, the circle is complete with an untitled portrait of Barbie in Italian Renaissance robes, holding an infant boy. The surreal image is an intentionally

jarring complement to the other works in the exhibition. Following the ghostly horror of the encroaching Supreme Court, this vibrantly pigmented sanctification of Barbie being relegated to motherhood with a plastic smile carved onto her face echoes like a form of propaganda, utilized to convince women of a patriarchal ideal. It's the haunting climax to a bleak view of current affairs, but it is not without hope.

As we look upon Sandvoss's highly skilled and acerbically humorous paintings, we might find ourselves challenged by our very own reactions, judgements, and conclusions. Are you intrigued by what you see? Are you disgusted? Do you laugh or do you cry? Do you bow your head in anxious dread and carry forward into the rest of your day? Do you feel some form of disgust or revulsion to the conclusion being drawn? I invite you to take this opportunity to examine why these images affect you the way they do. No matter what end of the political spectrum we each find ourselves on we are all impacted by the common thread of neoliberalism that ties our suffering together for the benefit of someone else's bank account. These works by Sandvoss don't aim to merely point the finger at who she believes to be responsible for North America's current state of affairs, but importantly prompt us to reflect on who is benefitting from our division, our pain. In what direction does this lead us? Will fighting for our rights even matter, if our planet can't sustain us long enough to enjoy them?

Kellyn Kavanagh
Art on Demand 11.1 Curator

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alex Sandvoss is an internationally exhibiting artist born and raised in Surrey, BC. Sandvoss received a BMus from McGill University in jazz saxophone. She began painting during her free time, initially as an outlet from the pressures of school. After graduating, Sandvoss moved back to Surrey and, while working at an art store in the Downtown Eastside, was inspired to amalgamate her painting skills with her connection to social issues. Her first solo exhibition, *The Faces We Pass By Every Day* (2018), was met with great critical acclaim. Sandvoss has received international media attention for her painting and activism and has had paintings acquired by two international airports, the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) and the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA).



Front Cover: Alex Sandvoss, *A Hapless Toad (feat. The Supreme Court of The United States)*, 2023, oil on canvas, 40 x 48 in.

Inside: Alex Sandvoss, *A Promise*, 2023, oil on wood panel, 18 x 24 in.